



Diabetes and oral health

The link between diabetes and the health of your teeth and gums

When you have diabetes, it's important to take a holistic approach to your health care. Your mouth is connected to your body, which means any problems you have with your teeth or gums can affect your overall well-being. And, having diabetes affects your oral health.

If your blood glucose (sugar) is high, it can cause pain, swelling and infection in your mouth. This is because too much glucose in your saliva causes more plaque to grow on your teeth. Plaque also comes from foods with a lot of sugar or starch (such as breads and pastries). So, it's best to limit those in your diet.

When plaque is not removed, it hardens near the gum line of your teeth. This hurts the gums and causes the first stage of gum disease called gingivitis. If gingivitis isn't handled, it becomes periodontal disease. At this stage, the gums pull away from your teeth leaving an open space where infection can occur. If this is not treated, it will affect your tissue and bone below your teeth, which can lead to tooth loss and a lot of pain.

Smoking increases your chance of getting gum disease and other problems linked to diabetes. If you quit smoking, you lower your chances of serious health risks.

Prevent the pain

Managing your diabetes is the first step, so you can keep your blood glucose at a healthy level. Eat a well-balanced healthy diet, take your medicine and stay active. Get your weight to a normal level for your height and age. Pay special attention to your teeth and gums. Check your mouth often for swollen or bleeding gums.

Gum disease doesn't always have signs, so it's important that you see your dentist at least two times a year for a cleaning and checkup. Make sure to tell your dentist you have diabetes.

Your daily oral routine can make a big difference in the health of your teeth and gums:

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day.
- Floss your teeth daily.
- Use toothpaste with fluoride and a toothbrush with soft bristles.
- Brush gently at the gum line of your teeth.
- Get a new toothbrush every three months.



[Read more about diabetes and oral health at anthem.com.](https://www.anthem.com)
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Sources:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: *Diabetes Public Health Resource* (accessed February 2013): [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).
National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse website: *Prevent Diabetes Problems: Keep Your Mouth Healthy* (accessed February 2013): [diabetes.niddk.nih.gov](https://www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov).

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